

Keeping the Heat on the ATF

Whistleblowers often hold the keys to unlocking the secrets held deep in the closets of the federal bureaucracy. These patriotic citizens help me do my constitutional responsibility of oversight.

A couple months ago, a whistleblower came to me with information about a risky strategy being used by the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives to stop gun traffickers on the Southwest Border. He, and more than a dozen other agents on the ground in Arizona, had expressed their concerns to their supervisors, only to be ignored and ordered to watch and gather information on traffickers instead of making arrests as soon as they could. Before coming to me, the whistleblower also contacted the Department of Justice Inspector General's Office about his concerns. The whistleblower was concerned that the circumstances surrounding the death of Customs and Border Patrol Agent Brian Terry were being swept under the rug because the Bureau did not want a debate of the strategy to let thousands of guns fall into the hands of the bad guys after being purchased by straw-buyers. Letting a known bad guy get away with the guns is known as letting the weapons "walk." Terry was killed in a firefight on December 14, 2010. Two AK-47-type guns that the ATF had let "walk" in 2009 were recovered at the scene.

I've been keeping the heat on the Justice Department and the ATF to come forward and be accountable to the American people and to the family of Agent Terry. As part of my ongoing investigation I pressed the Secretary of Homeland Security, Janet Napolitano, (she testified before the Senate Judiciary Committee this week, where I am the leading Republican) about the case, her knowledge of ATF's strategy, and the role Immigration and Customs Enforcement agents had in letting guns "walk."

The ATF's policy has affected the lives of countless people who may have been victims of crimes perpetrated as a result of letting guns fall into the hands of criminals. My questions to the Secretary of Homeland Security revolved around how the various agencies involved were working together, what the various agencies in the Department of Homeland Security knew about the strategy employed by the ATF, and the policy behind arming Border Patrol agents, knowing that the ATF was allowing guns to move across the border.

The Secretary offered very few detailed answers to my questions, but I'll continue my effort to get a full accounting from all the agencies involved.